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Intergroup contact, value system and the representation of homosexuality

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Abstract

This study has explored relationship between intergroup contact, levels of prejudice against homosexuals and the value system of the subjects. A value orientation characterized by more openness to change, self-transcendence and progressive correlates with a positive representation of homosexuality. Two subgroups have been formed according to the degree of contact with gay people. The group who claimed to know more than ten homosexuals, compared who claimed not to know any, has shown: a value orientation characterized by more openness to change, more self-transcendence and less conservatism, as well as more positive attitudes toward gay people.

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1. Introduction

The contact between ingroup and outgroup members reduces intergroup conflict, only when it takes place and develops under specific and definite conditions. The required conditions for a high quality grade contact among ingroup and outgroup members are: cooperation between groups in bringing into effect shared and mutual objectives; equal terms relationship status; a sufficient lass of time intended to enable a better knowledge of the other; social and state support for the purpose of encouraging an atmosphere of understanding (Allport, 1954).

Pettigrew (1998), (as Amir, 1976), dealing with prejudice levels reduction, underlines the importance of disguised bonds of friendship among members belonging to different social groups (cross-group friendship hypothesis). Concerning this issue, the author structures the models related to decategorization (Brewer & Miller, 1984), to mutual intergroup differentiation (Hewstone, & Brown, 1986) and to common ingroup identity (Gaetner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993): social interactions would be encouraged by a reduction of inter-categorical salience while the maintenance of interactions on interpersonal level would encourage, eventually, cross-group friendship; these cross-group friendship would sustain an increase of inter-categorical salience and curb the risk of intergroup differentiation; cross-group friendship would facilitate re-categorization on common ingroup identity and the generalization of attitudes among all outgroup members. Cross-group friendship would follow, in the majority of cases, at least three of the conditions as Allport (1954) expected. Friends generally cooperate in order

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to reach their shared and mutual objectives. Their bond is characterized by an equal status and a constant, extended, close contact (Pettigrew, & Tropp, 2006).

The effectiveness of contact hypothesis in reducing negative attitudes against outgroup members is corroborated by Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) meta-analysis on more than 500 case studies. On 94% of case studies taken into consideration, they pointed out that contact revealed negative correlations with prejudice levels. If average negative correlation between intergroup contact and prejudice showed a figure of about $r=-0.22$, we got a stronger negative correlation of about $r=-0.29$ when we took into consideration only the cases under all the conditions for a better contact, as defined by Allport (1954). For this reason, the concurrence of the conditions expected by Allport may not be essential to achieve a reduction of prejudice levels, even if it facilitates and reinforces the contact positive effects on outgroup representation. The authors have also analysed the relation between cross-group friendship and prejudice levels. Studies based on cross-group friendship, to appraise indirect contact value, showed significant and stronger correlations between contact and prejudice in comparison with other research analysis (Pettigrew, & Tropp, 2006).

In a longitudinal study (Binder et al., 2009), a circular causal relationship between contact and prejudice was found, as contact reduces prejudice levels even if an opposite case can also take place. In addition to this, the results showed that contact effects are mediated by intergroup anxiety (anxiety and embarrassment experienced in contact with out-group members). They highlighted also that quantity and quality of friendship contact positively affect prejudice levels, especially when outgroup members are seen as typical (Anderssen, 2002).

Sagiv and Schwartz (1995) investigated the way in which value system influenced intergroup relations. Particularly, they examined the existing relation between the importance assigned to values and readiness for out-group social contact. The subjects who gave greater importance to universalism and self-direction values seemed to be more open to outgroup social contact, while those who gave a higher significance to tradition, security and conformity values seemed to show a refusal to get in contact with outgroup members.

Particularly, positive correlations were found between intergroup contact and the representation of homosexuality. In a meta-analysis carried out by Smith, Axelton and Saucier (2009), through 41 researches on prejudice against homosexuals, was found a negative correlation between contact and antigay attitudes.

Cross-group friendship hypothesis has showed to be effective even in reducing prejudice against homosexuals. Cross-group friendship shows to be directly effective either on the strength and access of attitudes or on intergroup anxiety; it has indirectly effects on the attitudes against homosexuals through intergroup anxiety. Intimacy of friendship mediates the relation between cross-group friendship and intergroup anxiety. Such mediation takes place only when a friend is considered as a typical outgroup member (Vonofakou, Hewstone, & Voci, 2007).

Herek and Capitanio (1996) specifically investigated on quantity and quality of contact. The results showed that prejudice levels against homosexuals are negatively related to the quality and quantity of the contact. In this aspect, even, living together with homosexuals lessens sexual prejudice levels (Bowen, & Bourgeois, 2001).

Contact is therefore effective in reducing sexual prejudice levels (Çirakoğlu, 2006), and in homosexual positive representation (gays and lesbians) as well as in promoting positive attitudes towards themselves (Mohipp, & Morry, 2004).

2. Hypotheses

This study has explored relationship between levels of prejudice against homosexuals and the value system of the subjects. Also we assumed that contact with homosexuals is related positively to: 1) a lessening of prejudice against such people; 2) a value system open to change and social relations.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The sample is composed by 100 female students from Catania University. The results concern who have defined their sexual orientation between heterosexual or prevalently heterosexual (97%); who have defined their sexual orientation between homosexual or prevalent homosexual (3%) was removed from data analysis.

In analyzing the data we created two groups, with a view to the level of contact with homosexuals. The first group (Group A, N=21) composed of people who claimed to know more than 10 homosexuals, while the second group (Group B, N=25) knew any homosexuals at all.

3.2. Measures

Components of Attitudes toward Homosexuality by LaMar and Kite (1998). This scale has been used to measure prejudice levels toward homosexuals. It offers the possibility to analyse different features of attitudes against homosexuality. In particular, we take into consideration six outstanding aspects: Condemnation; Contact; Neutral contact; Stereotypes; Morality; Neutral morality. According to a scale constituted by 30 items, each statement indicates the degree of agreement or disagreement on a seven grade scale, which goes from “total agreement” to “total disagreement”.

The Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) by Schwartz (2001), in the Italian version (Capanna, Vecchione, & Schwartz, 2005). This scale has been used in order to assess the subjects' value system. The questionnaire consists of 40 items and the subject has to check the answers that most closely describe his preference, on a six grade scale (from “not like me at all” to “totally like me”). In particular, four higher order value types can be singled out: Self-enhancement, Self-transcendence, Openness to change, Conservatism.

A question on contact; the question has been asked to assess contact degree with out-group members: “How many homosexuals do you know?”

Background questions; A semi-structured questionnaire aimed at getting information about sexual orientation, age, educational level, place of residence, and parents' educational level.

3.3. Preliminary Data Processing

When we assessed performances, in order to measure data, we transformed scale scores from 1 to 7, within indifference point 4.

The checking of statistics significance differences has been carried out by the following tests. MANOVA (Multivariate Analysis of Variance) with N factors within, concerning the comparison of scores on: Components of Attitudes toward Homosexuality; Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ). Multivariate Test and Between-subjects effects in order to verify the incidence of independent variable. Correlation matrix among variables in order to value interdependence degree among levels of prejudice against homosexuals and the value system. Cronbach's alpha to check reliability of assessment inventory scales used.

The data analysis has been performed through the software SPSS, 15.5 for Windows.

4. Results

4.1. Sexual prejudice and value system

The sample generally showed positive attitudes toward homosexuals: almost all factors on prejudice (Cronbach's Alpha = .62 ÷ .86) have been evaluated with scores going well under the indifference point (MANOVA, $F(5.480)=128.48$ $p<.001$).

In particular, lower scores concerned Condemnation ($M=1.60$ SD .58) and Contact ($M=1.97$ SD .79). Slight higher score have been given to: morality field, concerning both homosexuals (Morality $M=2.62$ SD .97) and the concept of homosexuality (Neutral Morality $M=2.28$ SD 1.28); to stereotypic representation of homosexuals (Stereotypes $M=3.12$ SD 1). At last, scores concerning Neutral Contact can overlap indifference point ($M=4.05$ SD 1.44).

The value system of our subjects seems to be characterized by some readiness for social relations and changes (MANOVA, $F(3.288) = 98.81$ $p<.001$). In particular, we have assigned: medium-high level scores to Self-transcendence ($M=5.70$ SD .78) and medium level scores to Openness to change ($M=5.20$ SD .80); medium-low level scores to Conservatism ($M=4.56$ SD .81); level scores which are superimposable to Self-enhancement indifference point ($M=3.93$ SD .98) (Cronbach's Alpha = .66 ÷ .825).

We found significant correlations between some fields of the value system and the features of prejudice (Table 1). Self-transcendence is negatively related with: condemnation of homosexuals (Condemnation $r=-.47$, $p<.01$); a traditional moral orientation concerning both homosexuals (Morality $r=-.45$, $p<.01$); and the concept of homosexuality in itself (Neutral Morality $r=-.32$, $p<.01$); a perception of “social distance” from homosexuals (Contact $r=-.37$, $p<.01$) even of the same sex (Neutral Contact $r=-.25$, $p<.05$); a stereotyped representation of homosexuals (Stereotypes $r=-.39$, $p<.01$). Openness to change is negatively related to: condemnation of homosexuals (Condemnation $r=-.29$, $p<.01$); traditional moral orientation concerning both homosexuals (Morality $r=-.32$, $p<.01$) and the concept of homosexuality in itself (Neutral morality $r=-.24$, $p<.05$); “social distance” perception from homosexuals of the same sex (Neutral contact $r=-.30$, $p<.01$); a stereotyped representation of homosexuals (Stereotypes $r=-.25$, $p<.05$). Conservatism is positively related with: traditional moral orientation concerning the concept of homosexuality (Neutral morality $r=.27$, $p<.05$); a “social distance” perception from homosexuals (Contact $r=.23$, $p<.05$) even of the same sex (Neutral contact $r=.36$, $p<.01$); a stereotyped representation of homosexuals (Stereotypes $r=.29$, $p<.01$).

Table 1. Correlation Matrix among Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
C.A.T.H.										
1. Condemnation	1									
2. Morality	.55**	1								
3. Neutral Morality	.51**	.73**	1							
4. Contact	.62**	.60**	.64**	1						
5. Neutral Contact	.30**	.46**	.40**	.48**	1					
6. Stereotypes	.47**	.59**	.50**	.45**	.48**	1				
P.V.Q.										
7. Self-Enhancement	.09	.05	.17	.15	-.07	.11	1			
8. Self-Transcendence	-.47**	-.45**	-.32**	-.37**	-.25*	-.39**	.03	1		
9. Openness to change	-.29**	-.32**	-.24*	-.17	-.30**	-.25*	.39**	.43**	1	
10. Conservation	.07	.17	.27*	.23*	.36**	.29**	.21*	.19	-.07	1

Note

* $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$.

C.A.T.H.= Components of Attitudes Toward Homosexuality.

P.V.Q.= Portrait Values Questionnaire.

4.2. Contact: sexual prejudice and value system

We found significant differences on value system concerning the two groups who stood out for the amount of contacts with homosexuals.

We found out that the group who had known more than 10 homosexuals (Group A), in comparison with the group who stated to have known any (Group B), gave lower scores in almost all dimensions concerning prejudice: Condemnation (Group A $M=1.41$ Vs Group B $M=1.72$; $F=3.84$, $p=.05$); Morality (Group A $M=2.30$ Vs Group B $M=2.93$; $F=4.96$, $p=.03$); Neutral Morality (Group A $M=1.84$ Vs Group B $M=2.75$; $F=6.06$, $p=.02$); Contact (Group A $M=1.74$ Vs Group B $M=2.12$; NS); Neutral Contact (Group A $M=3.30$ Vs Group B $M=4.38$; $F=6.04$, $p=.02$); Stereotypes (Group A $M=2.58$ Vs Group B $M=3.57$; $F=14.61$, $p<.001$).

With reference to the value field, it came out that the group who stated to know more than ten homosexuals (Group A), compared with the group who claimed not to know any (Group B), shows to get: significant higher score to Self-transcendence (Group A $M=6.02$ Vs Group B $M=5.54$, $F=6.44$, $p=.01$) and Openness to change (Group A $M=5.50$ Vs Group B $M=4.76$, $F=8.91$, $p<.01$); lower scores to Conservatism (Group A $M=4.19$ Vs Group B $M=4.95$, $F=11.30$, $p<.01$).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The searched dimensions generally seem to be positively oriented. The picture related to prejudice is positive and in line with what has been found in studies related to the gender variable (La Mar, & Kite, 1998). As far as regards the value system, people who joined the research regard themselves as pro-social people and open to change.

Such a value system, pro-social relations oriented and open to change, reflects a positive representation of homosexuality. This orientation is also confirmed by the positive correlation between Conservatism and “prejudicial” thinking.

Prejudice levels and value system seem to be closely connected with the contact of outgroup members. People who stated to know more than 10 homosexuals show: more positive and less stereotyped attitudes toward themselves; a stronger readiness for contact with homosexual of the same sex; a value system open to change, pro-social and less tied to traditions.

The confirmed relations between prejudice, value system and contact may refer to a circular logic of cause and effect, according to recent studies (Binder, et al., 2009), rather than to a linear logic where one of the elements is seen as the first cause while the others constitute a simple effect. If contact lessens prejudice levels, a wider open minded attitude to contact, due to lower prejudice levels or a pro- social oriented value and open to change, would increase and facilitate contacts with outgroup members.

In a next research, we will take into account the effect of the context-variables (sex, religion, education, etc.).

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